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SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 02/13/08

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- (1) Two local governments in Okinawa file protest; Governor touches on revision of the Status of Forces Agreement

TOKYO ONLINE (Slightly abridged)

13:43 PM, February 13, 2008

Photo of U.S. Ambassador to Japan Schieffer and Okinawa Prefecture Governor Hirokazu Nakaima, who has just been handed a letter addressed to the victim and family

In the case of rape of a third-year junior high school girl in Okinawa, the assemblies of Okinawa City and Chatan Town, both localities related to the incident, held an emergency session this morning and passed by unanimous agreement a protest resolution and written statement calling on the U.S. and Japanese governments to take steps to prevent a recurrence, apologize, and pay compensation. Governor HIrokazu Nakaima in a reply to the prefectural assembly made his first statement since the incident in which he expressed his view of seeking a drastic revision of the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA).

U.S. Ambassador to Japan Schieffer in the afternoon visited Governor Nakaima at his prefectural office and stated: "I feel it was regrettable that this kind of incident has occurred. My heart goes out to the girl and her family who have suffered." He entrusted the governor with a letter addressed to the victim and her family.

Governor Nakaima at the prefectural assembly stated: "In resolving these sorts of problems centered on the U.S. bases, it is not enough just to improve the application of the Japan-U.S. SOFA, which gives the U.S. side a free hand. There must be a drastic revision of it."

(2) Okinawa engulfed in anger over rape of 14-year-old schoolgirl by U.S. Marine

MAINICHI (Page 3) (Abridged slightly)
February 13, 2008

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Possible adverse effect on U.S. base realignment

The alleged rape of a 14-year-old schoolgirl by a U.S. Marine last Sunday in the town of Chatan in Okinawa has heightened anti-base sentiment across the country amid the ongoing realignment of U.S. forces in Japan. As was the case with the September 1995 rape incident, there is a possibility that the latest incident will adversely affect the planned realignment of U.S. bases, including the relocation of Futenma Air Station. The government is desperately trying to keep the rape incident separate from the base-relocation issue.

"If the incident had occurred during the election campaign period, a severe result would have naturally come out."

The comment came from the mouth of an officer of the camp of Yoshihiko Fukuda, 37, who won the Feb. 10 Iwakuni mayoral election in Yamaguchi Prefecture by a margin of only 1,782 votes. Fukuda is a proponent of the relocation of a U.S. carrier-based air wing to the U.S. base in the city. A senior Defense Ministry official, too, commented: "It gives me a chill just to imagine the incident had occurred a day earlier. The outcome would have been completely different."

The comments by the two persons indicate that to municipalities hosting U.S. bases, incidents involving U.S. servicemen are serious enough to affect the will of local voters.

Although incidents involving U.S. servicemen are not confined to Okinawa, the situation in the prefecture, which hosts the bulk of U.S. bases in Japan, is particularly serious. Anger over the latest incident is quickly spreading in the prefecture. It has been 13 years since the 1995 schoolgirl rape incident that led to the consolidation and reduction of U.S. bases, including a return of Futenma Air Station.

Governor Hirokazu Nakaima on the morning of Feb. 11 after the incident came to light said glumly: "The prefecture was hit by another incident, which should never have occurred. Naturally, it will negatively affect the sentiment of the Okinawa public."

At the same time, the governor indicated that it would not directly affect the Futenma relocation plan, for which talks are underway with the central government.

Although Nakaima is at odds with the government over the relocation site in Nago for Futenma Air Station, he supports the realignment of U.S. forces in Okinawa, believing it will help reduce U.S. bases in the prefecture. Nakaima is apparently trying to stem the mounting anti-base sentiment by presenting the view that the alleged sexual assault and the realignment plan are two different matters. A senior prefectural official noted: "The governor really does not want to see the rape incident take a toll on the realignment issue."

A protest movement is steadily spreading in Okinawa, however. The Naha City Assembly adopted a protest resolution yesterday. The prefectural assembly is expected to adopt a resolution tomorrow. Other municipalities are likely to follow suit. Many civic groups and labor unions released statements of protest or staged protest rallies yesterday.

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Reformist prefectural assemblyman Chosei Taira suggested the possibility of holding a nonpartisan prefectural rally. The Liberal Democratic Party Okinawa chapter holds the key to holding such a rally. Secretary General Tetsuji Shingaki took this view: "Although the latest incident is a despicable crime, it is different from the 1995 incident. There has been no talk of a prefectural rally, either."

University of the Ryukyus Professor Jun Shimabukuro said: "In 1995, reformist Governor Masahide Ota was at the helm of the prefectural government. The political situation was different from today, when LDP-backed Nakaima is at the helm. Iwakuni, too, has a new mayor who supports the relocation plan. The government will probably advance the U.S. force realignment plan irrespective of Okinawa's wishes."

Government draws line between incident and Futenma plan

On the morning of Feb. 11, the day after the incident, the Foreign Ministry requested the U.S. Embassy in Japan to take steps to prevent a recurrence and strengthen discipline among U.S. military personnel. In a cabinet meeting yesterday, Prime Minister Fukuda also ordered the cabinet ministers to respond carefully to the incident. For the sake of the planned Futenma relocation, the government definitely wants to avoid a rehash of an outcry in Okinawa that followed the 1995 rape incident.

The government is also pressed to give consideration to the sentiment of people in Okinawa as well as to relations with the United States. Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba after the cabinet meeting yesterday expressed his anger by saying, "The incident concerns the foundation of the Japan-U.S. alliance," adding, "But the incident and the Futenma relocation are two separate subjects."

The governments of Japan and the United States agreed in May 2006 to complete building a Futenma replacement facility by 2014. On subsequent occasions, such as the Japan-U.S. summit last November, the two governments have confirmed the implementation of the agreement.

Ishiba denied the possibility of moving up the Futenma relocation plan, saying: "There are many base burdens. It is not appropriate to think that Futenma Air Station must be relocated early (because of the latest incident)." Foreign Minister Masahiko Koumura also underlined the importance of the bilateral agreement, noting: "Aircraft using Futenma Air fly over residential areas. It is best to relocate the air station as planned."

The environment surrounding the government today is totally different from that in 1995. Following the rape incident that year, the coalition government of the LDP, Social Democratic Party of Japan, and New Party Sakigake (Harbingers) launched the Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO) to discuss ways to consolidate and reduce U.S. bases in Okinawa. Then Governor Masahide Ota

demanding all U.S. bases, including Futenma, be returned in steps by 2015. The Okinawa issue became a top priority for the administration. An agreement was eventually reached in April 1996 between then U.S. Ambassador to Japan Walter Mondale and Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto to return Futenma Air Station.

In the meantime, Chief Cabinet Secretary Machimura recently quoted Governor Nakaima as saying that (the rape incident) would not directly affect the Futenma plan. The government sees Okinawa's

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cooperative stance as a favorable wind blowing its direction. The largest opposition Democratic Party of Japan is not opposed to U.S. force realignment, either. The Okinawa issue is unlikely to be a point of dispute for Lower House dissolution. DPJ President Ichiro Ozawa simply said yesterday: "Tokyo might not have discussed (U.S. force realignment) with Washington on an equal footing. Questions will be raised about the reality of the Japan-U.S. alliance."

(3) Gov't desperate to calm down situation

RYUKYU SHIMPO (Page 2) (Abridged)
February 13, 2008

In the wake of an Okinawa-based U.S. serviceman's rape of a junior high school girl, the government was quick to move, desperately trying to calm down the situation, with the suspect denying his alleged rape. That is partly because the government wanted to avoid repercussions on the planned realignment of U.S. forces in Japan, including the relocation of Futenma airfield. However, there is no knowing if the government's quick action will lead to effective steps for the prevention of a recurrence and for the enforcement of discipline. Meanwhile, the incident this time took place in connection with the U.S. serviceman living in off-base housing. Local residents are therefore feeling uneasy about U.S. servicemen living outside their bases.

"Never again." "It will seriously affect Japan-U.S. relations." Foreign Minister Masahiko Koumura, Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba, and other government leaders voiced their indignation when they met the press yesterday following the incident.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura hurriedly announced yesterday that the government would send Senior Vice Foreign Minister Itsunori Onodera to Okinawa. It was "unusually quick action," according to a Foreign Ministry official.

What concerns the government is a potential impact on the relocation of Futenma airfield. In 1995, U.S. servicemen gang-raped a local schoolgirl. That incident developed into struggles all over Okinawa Prefecture against U.S. military bases.

"At that time," a senior official of the Defense Ministry recalled, "the government was late in taking action." This official went on, "That intensified the local people's anger." The official added, "I don't want to see that again." Another senior official of the Defense Ministry said: "If (Okinawa Prefecture's) Governor Hirokazu Nakaima changes his mind and calls for the U.S. military to get out of Okinawa as soon as possible, then the government will have to give up. The incident is so serious."

"We want to prevent the flames from spreading," a senior official of the Defense Ministry. So does the U.S. military. "At the time of the 1995 incident, the Okinawa area coordinator of the U.S. forces in Okinawa called on the governor one week after that incident. The rest is up to your judgment, though." The Foreign Ministry's Okinawa office provided this information to the U.S. military. U.S. Okinawa Area Coordinator Zilmer suddenly paid a call on Gov. Nakaima yesterday evening. The government had moved so quickly. The sudden visit surprised Nakaima. "I was thinking of going over there," Nakaima said. "But," he added, "they came first."

Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda and other government leaders, meeting

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the press yesterday, suggested the need to take further steps for the enforcement of discipline and for the prevention of a recurrence. However, they did not talk about any specific plan. "This is the best the government can do in its quick action," one government official admitted. "As for the rest," this official presumes, "the government will have to watch public opinion." With this, the official also implied that the government's quick move could end up as an appeal to keep down the local sentiment.

The incident this time broke out in connection with a U.S. serviceman who lived in an off-base house. Chatan Town Mayor Masaharu Noguni, in his request to the government yesterday, also expressed local anxieties about U.S. servicemen living outside their bases.

Noguni told Okinawa Defense Bureau Director General Ro Manabe: "There are many houses for foreigners, so the local residents are feeling very uneasy while thinking that U.S. soldiers like him are in the neighborhood. There are quite many foreigners living in the Sunabe area of Chatan Town, so the anxieties (of local communities) are growing strong."

In point of fact, however, it is hard to find out the actual number of U.S. servicemen living in off-base houses. "They have no resident registration, so we can't grasp the actual situation." So saying, Noguni looked downhearted.

(4) Main points from meeting between Gov. Nakaima, U.S. Okinawa Area Coordinator Zilmer

RYUKYU SHIMPO (Page 2) (Full)
February 13, 2008

U.S. Forces' Okinawa Area Coordinator Zilmer: I really deplore the incident that was directed at the girl. I'm worried about how much the hearts of victimized girl and her family have been hurt. We sincerely take the incident this time and will continue to fully cooperate on the Okinawa Police Station's investigations. We will give instructions and educational programs to the Marines from tomorrow, not only in Okinawa but also all over Japan, about morals, including the basic values. This week, we will also educate all the Marines under my command. I want Okinawa Prefecture's people and the Japanese people to understand that an incident like the one this time is contrary to the military personnel's essential values.

Okinawa Gov. Hirokazu Nakaima: I feel that an incident like this has happened again, and I think it is extremely regrettable. If an incident like this continues, the Okinawa prefectural people's anger will reach its peak, and it may seriously affect base issues in the future. I want the United States to further enforce discipline and educate the Marines in a thoroughgoing way so that such an incident will never happen again, and I want you to make all-out efforts to prevent a recurrence. The incident is an extremely outrageous crime that tramples down women's human rights. I feel strong indignation, considering the fact that the victim is a junior high school student.

Consul General Maher: On behalf of the U.S. government, I think that the incident this time is extremely regrettable. The U.S. government also takes it sincerely. In addition, I also feel sympathy for the victim and family.

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Gov. Nakaima: I hope the United States will thoroughly carry out what we've talked about today.

(5) Somewhat dubious about groups clamoring against U.S. and U.S. bases

SANKEI (Page 5) (Abridged)
February 13, 2008

Nobuaki Hanaoka

A disgusting incident has taken place again. A U.S. Marine stationed in Okinawa allegedly raped a schoolgirl.

The authorities concerned need to shed light on the incident and should condemn this crime. As a matter of course, this Marine will be given a severe punishment. No matter how much he tries, he can never make up for the crime he committed because a 14-year-old girl will suffer the damage he caused to her during the rest of her life.

Keeping all this in mind, I still need to write that it is understandable for locals to take the incident this time as a recurrence of the 1995 rape incident that involved an elementary school girl and U.S. servicemen, but that there is something dubious about anti-U.S. and anti-base groups that are now in high spirits, apparently encouraged by the incident.

If they use the incident as a political tool, their attitude would be taken as lacking consideration for the victim.

The freedom of speech may allow them to loudly shout in chorus, "The U.S. forces should leave here." But if they do so, they need to be responsible for what they say. Needless to say, Japan relies on America's "nuclear umbrella" for its national security. If they call on the U.S. forces to withdraw from Japan, they then need to insist that Japan nuclear-arm itself; otherwise the security environment around Japan would drastically shift.

The military situation in East Asia could become tense if a power vacuum emerges there. Who would then chuckle to himself? We need to consider this point when we discuss security policy in a sober and pragmatic manner.

This incident may give heads of municipalities and assembly members in Okinawa an opportunity to sit on the fence again in dealing with the relocation of the U.S. military's Futenma Air Station. The only way for Okinawa to follow would be to co-exist with the bases for co-prosperity. They are fully aware of this but they have failed to devote themselves body and soul to realizing that.

One decade has already passed since the Japan-U.S. Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO) announced that the site of the Futenma base would be returned to Japan, and that the base's heliport would be relocated somewhere. Japan and the U.S. have agreed on a plan to relocate the heliport to somewhere around Camp Schwab, but there has been no progress so far in terms of coordination with locals on the relocation issue.

Some segments of the media are reporting on the incident in a highly emotional and hysterical fashion. This way of reporting is difficult to understand. The incident is one thing but security is another.

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Journalism should not forget the crucial importance of the Japan-U.S. alliance.

(6) Discord between Ozawa and Hatoyama propelled by Ozawa's skipping override vote in Lower House plenary session

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)
February 9, 2008

The troika system of the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) appears to be shaking. Propelled by President Ichiro Ozawa having skipped an override vote in a House of Representatives plenary session, there is discord between Ozawa and Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama. Non-mainstream lawmakers, who had

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remained silent, have begun to move into action with an eye on the political situation after the September party leadership race and an expected dissolution of the Lower House followed by elections.

On the night of Feb. 5 at a Japanese restaurant in Tokyo, Kyocera Honorary Chairman Kazuo Inamori told Ozawa, Hatoyama, Naoto Kan, deputy president of the DPJ, and DPJ Upper House Caucus Chairman

Azuma Koshiishi: "I want you to remain on good terms whatever happens in order to take over the reins of government." Inamori is known as a strong supporter of Ozawa. Hatoyama, thinking that Inamori spoke for Ozawa, said to persons close to him: "We have tried to protect Mr. Ozawa, but ..." He said that as if Ozawa was the person who was spoiling the harmony.

Inamori had to use the wording "remain on good terms" because Ozawa and Hatoyama have been at odds since the beginning of this year.

Hatoyama criticized Ozawa for skipping an override vote on the special measures bill to resume Japan's refueling mission in the Indian Ocean and for going to Osaka to support the DPJ-backed candidate running in the Osaka gubernatorial election. He said: "(Ozawa) should offer an apology to the public." He again made a critical comment: "(His skipping the vote) came under criticism from the public. It is one of the reasons for (the defeat)."

Ozawa then said: "I don't know what the secretary general said. As the party head, I make my own priorities about my own duties. He expressed his annoyance with Hatoyama, saying: "I don't know what the secretary general said. I don't think that (my abstaining from voting) affected (the result of the election)."

It was also unveiled that their communication was not good as to whether they would attend the Davos Conference. Regarding a battle at the Diet over a stopgap bill to retain the provisional tax rates, Hatoyama worked for an agreement between the ruling and opposition camps through the good offices of the leaders of the two Diet houses. Ozawa, who had urged a settlement of the Diet battle, however, said: "I'm not the person in charge since I did not look into the contents of the agreement and did not order it."

Hatoyama has supported Ozawa even when distrust of him grew in the party over the notion of forming a grand coalition with the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Hatoyama's aide described the feelings of Hatoyama as the eruption of piled-up anger.

Moves by non-Ozawa group

The moves of Hatoyama could affect the political dynamics in the

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DPJ.

Recently, moves by a non-Ozawa force have become noticeable. Yoshito Sengoku, former policy chief, who made a candid remark about the grand coalition uproar, visited South Korea from Feb. 10 as a suprapartisan group member along with Taku Yamasaki and Koichi Kato of the LDP. The suprapartisan group includes Yukio Edano, Sakihito Ozawa, Takashi Doi, and Renho, who have close ties with Sengoku, Hatoyama, Kan and Yoshihiko Noda.

There is a view in the DPJ that the participation in the suprapartisan group by Sengoku and Edano alone would have underscored an anti-Ozawa tinge. Kan has emphasized that the Seoul visit is a diplomatic purpose. He said: "It is desirable to build channels of communication to South Korea. The visit to South Korea by nonpartisan Diet members is a good option." However, a view still remains that the move will become an encircling net of Ozawa in the presidential election.

Hatoyama along with former LDP Secretary General Taro Aso participated in a nonpartisan group to aim at computerization of administrative procedure drew attention. His participation drew attention. In a press conference on Feb. 8, Hatoyama said: "Joint activities by ruling and opposition members tend to prompt all sorts of conjectures. However, there is no concern about (the visit to South Korea). We will take over the reins of government under the leadership of President Ozawa." He, meanwhile, showed understanding toward the idea of fielding candidates against Ozawa in the presidential race, saying: "I think conducting a leadership race is a necessary process."

DPJ lawmakers close to Ozawa are frustrated with words and actions by Hatoyama and other members. One lawmaker said: "It is desirable

that Ozawa will be reelected without going through an election. But there are more factors in the party that worry us than outside the party."

(7) Difficulty expected in determining plan on new entity tasked with supervising consumer affairs policies due to protest from government agencies

MAINICHI (Page 2) (Excerpts)
February 13, 2008

The government's Council for Promoting Consumer Policy was launched yesterday, in accordance with Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda's goal of unifying consumer administrative functions. The panel was established earlier than initially scheduled in the aftermath of the recent food-poisoning outbreak involving Chinese-made frozen dumplings. Various plans regarding a new entity tasked with supervising consumer affairs policy are already on the table, and each has good and bad points. It will not be easy to pick one from among them. In the Chinese food-poisoning case, the government was slow to take countermeasures. Mapping out measures to prevent a slow response is another task for the panel. But government agencies involved in the plan are expected to put up resistance, so the panel may fail to produce actual results.

"Looking at all of you, I feel that a good result has already been made," the prime minister said in the first meeting of the council yesterday. The prime minister indicated his confidence in his personnel selection for the panel.

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Consumer administrative functions are now split among 10 government agencies, including the Cabinet Office, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW), and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. Relevant laws, such as the Food Sanitation Law and the JAS Law, are under the jurisdiction of different government agencies. Some critics point out the harmful effect of the vertically fragmented system of administration.

The Liberal Democratic Party's research council on consumer affairs issued its interim report this January as a basis for discussion on a new entity. Specifically, the panel proposed these three plans: (1) Create a consumer agency as the control tower for the relevant government agencies; (2) upgrade the Cabinet Office's Quality of Life Policy Bureau to an administrative committee with strong authority; and (3) beef up the functions of the said bureau and the National Consumer Affairs Center of Japan.

The first plan has the merit of creating a consulting office for consumers to pour out their complaints. On the other hand, government agencies that could lose their power are expected to raise objections. Fearing this possibility, the LDP gave consideration to each government agency in drafting its plan, noting: "The new plan should be premised on maintaining the current system of each government agency." There is the possibility that the new agency could be an extra body.

A senior government official said: "The prime minister may not be able to maintain his dignity" if no other measures are taken than beefing up the function of the Quality of Life Policy Bureau. The official indicated that only with a small-scale reform plan, questions might be raised about the prime minister's eagerness.

The most likely idea on a new body in the LDP research panel is the plan of upgrading the Cabinet Office's bureau to an administrative committee. A senior official of the Cabinet Office said: "The current authorities supervising consumer affairs, such the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, hold enormous sway over industrial circles, so such authorities naturally should be utilized." In this case, the main question is what to do about integrating their policymaking functions.

In the Chinese dumpling scare, it took more than a month until the information on damage that had been reported to local police stations and the National Consumer Affairs Center of Japan was

relayed to the MHLW. The new panel will also discuss how to unify consumer counseling services.

Prime Minister Fukuda appointed State Minister in Charge of People's Life Fumio Kishida, who now takes the lead in dealing with the Chinese food-poisoning case, as minister responsible for promoting consumer affairs administration, based on the view that "the lessons learned in this case should be reflected in discussion on a new consumer affairs agency," according to a close aide to the prime minister. Even so, since the details of the incident are under investigation, no progress has been made in discussing measures to prevent a recurrence.

SCHIEFFER